

SENATE BILL NO. 461

INTRODUCED BY BALES, KASTEN, LAMBERT, GEBHARDT, ANKNEY

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4 A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

5 TO RELEASE ALL OR A PORTION OF A BOND IF THE DEPARTMENT IS SATISFIED THAT RECLAMATION

6 OF COAL AND URANIUM OPERATIONS HAS BEEN COMPLETED; CLARIFYING WRITTEN FINDINGS AND

7 RECOMMENDATIONS; AND AMENDING SECTION 82-4-232, MCA."

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9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

**Section 1.** Section 82-4-232, MCA, is amended to read:

12 **"82-4-232. Area mining required -- bond -- alternative plan.** (1) (a) Area strip mining, a method of

13 operation that does not produce a bench or fill bench, is required where strip mining is proposed. The area of land

14 affected must be backfilled and graded to the approximate original contour of the land. However:

15 (i) consistent with the adjacent unmined landscape elements, the operator may propose and the

16 department may approve regraded topography gentler than premining topography in order to enhance the

17 postmining land use and develop a postmining landscape that will provide greater moisture retention, greater

18 stability, and reduced soil losses from runoff and erosion;

19 (ii) postmining slopes may not exceed the angle of repose or lesser slope as is necessary to achieve a

20 long-term static safety factor of 1.3 or greater and to prevent slides;

21 (iii) permanent impoundments may be approved if they are suitable for the postmining land use and

22 otherwise meet the requirements of this part, as provided by board rules; and

23 (iv) reclaimed topography must be suitable for the approved postmining land use.

24 (b) Spoil from the first cut is not required to be transported to the last cut if highwalls are eliminated, box

25 cut spoils are graded to blend in with the surrounding terrain, and the approximate original contour of the land

26 is achieved.

27 (c) When directed by the department, the operator shall construct in the final grading diversion ditches,

28 depressions, or terraces that will accumulate or control the water runoff.

29 (2) In addition to the backfilling and grading requirements, the operator's method of operation on steep

30 slopes may be regulated and controlled according to rules adopted by the board. These rules may require any

1 measure to accomplish the purpose of this part.

2 (3) For coal mining on prime farmlands, the board shall establish by rule specifications for soil removal,  
3 storage, replacement, and reconstruction, and the operator must as a minimum be required to:

4 (a) (i) segregate the A horizon of the natural soil, except ~~where~~ when it can be shown that other available  
5 soil materials will create a final soil having a greater productive capacity; and

6 (ii) if not used immediately, stockpile this material separately from other spoil and provide needed  
7 protection from wind and water erosion or contamination by other acid or toxic material;

8 (b) (i) segregate the B horizon of the natural soil, or underlying C horizon or other strata, or a combination  
9 of ~~such~~ the horizons or other strata that are shown to be both texturally and chemically suitable for plant growth  
10 and that can be shown to be equally or more favorable for plant growth than the B horizon in sufficient quantities  
11 to create in the regraded final soil a root zone of comparable depth and quality to that ~~which~~ that existed in the  
12 natural soil; and

13 (ii) if not used immediately, stockpile this material separately from other spoil and provide needed  
14 protection from wind and water erosion or contamination by acid or toxic material;

15 (c) replace and regrade the root zone material described in subsection (3)(b) with proper compaction  
16 and uniform depth over the regraded spoil material; and

17 (d) redistribute and grade in a uniform manner the surface soil horizon described in subsection (3)(a).

18 (4) All available topsoil must be removed in a separate layer, guarded from erosion and pollution, and  
19 kept in ~~such~~ a condition so that it can sustain vegetation of at least the quality and variety it sustained prior to  
20 removal. ~~provided that~~ However, the operator shall accord substantially the same treatment to any subsurface  
21 deposit of material that is capable, as determined by the department, of supporting surface vegetation virtually  
22 as well as the present topsoil. After the operation has been backfilled and graded, the topsoil or the best available  
23 subsurface deposit of material that is best able to support vegetation must be returned as the top layer.

24 (5) As determined by rules of the board, time limits must be established requiring backfilling, grading,  
25 subsidence stabilization, water control, highwall reduction, topsoiling, planting, and revegetation to be kept  
26 current. All backfilling, subsidence stabilization, sealing, grading, and topsoiling must be completed before  
27 necessary equipment is moved from the operation.

28 (6) (a) The permittee may file an application with the department for the release of all or part of a  
29 performance bond. The application must contain a proposed public notice of the precise location of the land  
30 affected, the number of acres for which bond release is sought, the permit and the date approved, the amount

1 of the bond filed and the portion sought to be released, the type and appropriate dates of reclamation work  
2 performed, and a description of the results achieved as they relate to the permittee's approved reclamation plan.  
3 In addition, as part of any bond release application, the permittee shall submit copies of letters that the permittee  
4 has sent to adjoining property owners, local governmental bodies, planning agencies, and sewage and water  
5 treatment authorities or water companies in the locality of the operation, notifying them of the permittee's intention  
6 to seek release from the bond.

7 (b) The department shall determine whether the application is administratively complete. An application  
8 is administratively complete if it includes:

9 (i) the location and acreage of the land for which bond release is sought;

10 (ii) the amount of bond release sought;

11 (iii) a description of the completed reclamation, including the date of performance;

12 (iv) a discussion of how the results of the completed reclamation satisfy the requirements of the approved  
13 reclamation plan; and

14 (v) information required by rules implementing this part.

15 (c) The department shall notify the applicant in writing of its determination no later than 60 days after  
16 submittal of the application. If the department determines that the application is not administratively complete,  
17 it shall specify in the notice those items that the application must address. After an application for bond release  
18 has been determined to be administratively complete by the department, the permittee shall publish a public  
19 notice that has been approved as to form and content by the department at least once a week for 4 successive  
20 weeks in a newspaper of general circulation in the locality of the mining operation.

21 (d) Any person with a valid legal interest that might be adversely affected by the release of a bond or the  
22 responsible officer or head of any federal, state, or local governmental agency that has jurisdiction by law or  
23 special expertise with respect to any environmental, social, or economic impact involved in the operation or is  
24 authorized to develop and enforce environmental standards with respect to the operation may file written  
25 objections to the proposed release of bond to the department within 30 days after the last publication of the  
26 notice. If written objections are filed and a hearing is requested, the department shall hold a public hearing in the  
27 locality of the operation proposed for bond release or in Helena, at the option of the objector, within 30 days of  
28 the request for hearing. The department shall inform the interested parties of the time and place of the hearing.  
29 The date, time, and location of the public hearing must be advertised by the department in a newspaper of  
30 general circulation in the locality for 2 consecutive weeks. Within 30 days after the hearing, the department shall

1 notify the permittee and the objector of its final decision.

2 (e) Without prejudice to the rights of the objector or the permittee or the responsibilities of the department  
3 pursuant to this section, the department may establish an informal conference to resolve written objections.

4 (f) For the purpose of the hearing under subsection (6)(d), the department may administer oaths,  
5 subpoena witnesses or written or printed materials, compel the attendance of witnesses or the production of  
6 materials, and take evidence, including but not limited to conducting inspections of the land affected and other  
7 operations carried on by the permittee in the general vicinity. A verbatim record of each public hearing required  
8 by this section must be made, and a transcript must be made available on the motion of any party or by order of  
9 the department.

10 (g) If the applicant significantly modifies the application after the application has been determined to be  
11 administratively complete, the department shall conduct a new review, including an administrative completeness  
12 determination. A significant modification includes but is not limited to:

13 (i) the notification of an additional property owner, local governmental body, planning agency, or sewage  
14 and water treatment authority of the permittee's intention to seek a bond release;

15 (ii) a material increase in the acreage for which a bond release is sought or in the amount of bond release  
16 sought; or

17 (iii) a material change in the reclamation for which a bond release is sought or the information used to  
18 evaluate the results of that reclamation.

19 (h) The department shall, within 30 days of determining that the application is administratively complete  
20 or as soon as weather permits, conduct an inspection and evaluation of the reclamation work involved. In the  
21 evaluation, the department shall consider, among other things, the degree of difficulty in completing any remaining  
22 reclamation, whether pollution of surface and subsurface water is occurring, the probability of continuance or  
23 future occurrence of the pollution, and the estimated cost of abating the pollution.

24 (i) The department shall review each administratively complete application to determine the acceptability  
25 of the application. A complete application is acceptable if the application is in compliance with all of the applicable  
26 requirements of this part, the rules adopted under this part, and the permit.

27 (j) (i) The department shall notify the applicant in writing regarding the acceptability of the application no  
28 later than 60 days from the date of the inspection.

29 (ii) If the department determines that the application is not acceptable, it shall specify in the notice those  
30 items that the application must address.

1 (iii) If the applicant revises the application in response to a notice of unacceptability, the department shall  
2 review the revised application and notify the applicant in writing within 60 days of the date of receipt as to whether  
3 the revised application is acceptable.

4 (iv) If the revision constitutes a significant modification, the department shall conduct a new review,  
5 beginning with an administrative completeness determination.

6 (v) A significant modification includes but is not limited to:

7 (A) the notification of an additional property owner, local governmental body, planning agency, or sewage  
8 and water treatment authority of the permittee's intention to seek a bond release;

9 (B) a material increase in the acreage for which a bond release is sought or the amount of bond release  
10 sought; or

11 (C) a material change in the reclamation for which a bond release is sought or the information used to  
12 evaluate the results of that reclamation.

13 (k) The department ~~may~~ shall release the bond in whole or in part if it is satisfied the reclamation covered  
14 by the bond or portion of the bond has been accomplished as required by this part according to the following  
15 schedule:

16 (i) When the permittee completes the plugging, backfilling, regrading, and drainage control of a bonded  
17 area in accordance with the approved reclamation plan, the department shall release 60% of the bond or  
18 collateral for the applicable permit area.

19 (ii) After revegetation has been established on the regraded lands in accordance with the approved  
20 reclamation plan, the department shall, for the period specified for operator responsibility of reestablishing  
21 revegetation, retain that amount of bond for the revegetated area that would be sufficient for a third party to cover  
22 the cost of reestablishing revegetation. Whenever a silt dam is to be retained as a permanent impoundment, the  
23 portion of bond may be released under this subsection (6)(k)(ii) if provisions for sound future maintenance by the  
24 operator or the landowner have been made with the department. Any part of the bond may not be released under  
25 this subsection (6)(k)(ii):

26 (A) as long as the lands to which the release would be applicable are contributing suspended solids to  
27 streamflow or runoff outside the permit area in excess of the requirements of 82-4-231(10)(k); or

28 (B) before soil productivity for prime farm lands to which the release would be applicable has returned  
29 to equivalent levels of yield as nonmined land of the same soil type in the surrounding area under equivalent  
30 management practices, as determined from the soil survey.

1 (iii) When the permittee has successfully completed all prospecting, mining, and reclamation activities,  
2 the department shall release the remaining portion of the bond, but not before the expiration of the period  
3 specified for responsibility and not until all reclamation requirements of this part are fully met.

4 (l) If the department disapproves the application for release of the bond or a portion of the bond, it shall  
5 notify:

6 (i) provide to the permittee, in writing, stating the reasons for disapproval and recommending detailed  
7 written findings demonstrating that the reclamation covered by the bond or a portion of the bond has not been  
8 accomplished as required by this part; and

9 (ii) recommend corrective actions necessary to secure the release and allowing opportunity for a public  
10 hearing.

11 (m) When an application for total or partial bond release is filed with the department, it shall notify the  
12 municipality or county in which a prospecting or mining operation is located by certified mail at least 30 days prior  
13 to the release of all or a portion of the bond.

14 (7) All disturbed areas must be reclaimed in a timely manner to conditions that are capable of supporting  
15 the land uses that they were capable of supporting prior to any mining or to higher or better uses as approved  
16 pursuant to subsection (8).

17 (8) (a) An operator may propose a higher or better use as an alternative postmining land use. If the  
18 landowner is not the operator, the operator shall submit written documentation of the concurrence of the  
19 landowner or the land management agency with jurisdiction over the land. The department may approve the  
20 proposed alternative postmining land use only if it meets all of the following criteria:

21 (i) There is a reasonable likelihood for achievement of the alternative land use.

22 (ii) The alternative land use does not present any actual or probable hazard to the public health or safety  
23 or any threat of water diminution or pollution.

24 (iii) The alternative land use will not:

25 (A) be impractical or unreasonable;

26 (B) be inconsistent with applicable land use policies or plans;

27 (C) involve unreasonable delay in implementation; or

28 (D) cause or contribute to violation of federal, state, or local law.

29 (b) As used in this section, the term "landowner" includes a person who has sold the surface estate to  
30 the operator with an option to repurchase the surface estate after mining and reclamation are complete.

